

IRISH MYTHOLOGY

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INTRODUCTION.

The mythology is a kind of enigmatic history. Once Jean Cocteau said that the history is more artificial and mendacious than the mythology. This author mentioned that the history was rewritten for thousands of times, so maybe the mythology is the real history and we should try to decode it somehow and to understand our ancestors [1]. So trying to comprehend the nation (we don't say a country, as now we have another borders and they are changing constantly), we should probably plunge into the history which is closely connected with the mythology on its early phase of development. This article is devoted to the nation which is the part of the British "brotherhood" of nations. The nation rich in enigmatic old stories, mythological figures, breathtaking culture, which is always connected there with toponymy and with etymological roots of the names. In all the languages we can find the closely connected words, similar in pronunciation and almost similar in meaning, maybe that is the main evidence that in ancient times all the nations were connected by one and only root based on the moral principles, which are actual till now, especially in European countries though the distance between some of the nations may be considered as rather far. But still the *object* of this article is the analyses of the mythological system of the Irish mythology and its roots.

I. IRISH MYTHOLOGICAL CYCLES.

To start with, we need to understand how the legends are preserved and what are the roots of all the myths. As they were emblematic representations of the time when Celtic peoples had no tradition of written literature, they were considered to be the oral heritage. Thus a rich store of pre-Christian epic tales in Old Irish has been preserved to modern times - many, of course, in late and modified versions based on lost originals. The conservation of pagan literature was not felt to be inconsistent with a devotion to the new cult [3; 24].

The first known written verses were called charms and as the scientists say were copied and recopied for several times, and though they postdate Christianity, they are based on pagan traditions. This kind of poetry contains a lot of words from Old

Irish. Such an ancient literature is based on the old pagan rituals, and the appurtenance to the Celtic practitioners is proved by the phrases in Old Irish found in these verses. Here are some examples found in the book “English medieval literature and its social foundations” by Margaret Schlauch:

*Ʒæt he næfre næbbe landes, Ʒæt he hit oðlænde,
ne foldan, Ʒæt hit oðferie,
be husa, Ʒæt he hit oðjealde (...)*

*let him never have land, he that may lead it away,
nor any earth, he that may take it away,
nor houses, he that may keep it away (...)*

The little extract from the Nine Herbs Charm:

*Wyrn com snican, toslat he man;
ða genam Woden viiii wukdortanas,
sloh ða Ʒa næddran, Ʒæt heo on viiii tofleah.*

*A worm came creeping, he cut at a man;
then Woden took nine glory-rods,
then he struck the adder so it burst into nine.*

The charm for unfruitful land is considered to be written in Christian period, though the word Erce in the pre-Christian tradition appealed to the goddess of fertility, to the Earth itself:

*Erce, Erce, Erce, eorþan modor,
geunne Ʒe se alwada, ece drihten,
æcera wexendra and wridendra,
eacniendra and elniendra.*

*Erce, Erce, Erce, mother of earth,
may the all-ruler grant thee, eternal lord,
fields that are growing and flourishing,
increasing and strength-giving [3; 10, 11].*

The mythological cycle is the part of the great system of myths, which describes mostly the life of one of the tribes living on the territory of Ireland. As to the sources of scientific researches on the Irish mythology, there are several cycles dealing with either mythology and origins of different gods and reigns, or the historical cycle.

Starting with mythological cycle, we can't but mention *the Tuatha Dé Danann* translated as the people(s) / tribe(s) of the goddess Dana or Danu. Each member of the Tuath Dé has been associated with a particular feature of life or

nature, but many appear to have more than one association. In Irish-Celtic mythology, it is the Irish race of gods, founded by the goddess Danu. These gods, who originally lived on 'the islands in the west', had perfected the use of magic. They traveled on a big cloud to the land that later would be called Ireland and settled there.

Shortly after their arrival they defeated the Firbolg at the first battle of Mag Tuireadh. In the second battle of Mag Tuireadh they fought and conquered the Fomorians, a race of giants who were the primordial inhabitants of Ireland. The Tuatha Dé dealt more subtly with the Fomorians than with the Firbolg, and gave them the province of Connacht. There was also some marrying between the two races.

Notable figures of Tuatha Dé Danann: Aengus - a god possibly associated with love, youth and poetic inspiration; Áine - goddess of love, summer, wealth and sovereignty; Banba, Ériu and Fódla - patron goddesses of Ireland; Bodb Derg - a king of the Tuatha Dé Danann; Brigid - daughter of the Dagda; associated with healing, fertility, craft and poetry; Clíodhna - queen of the Banshees; the Dagda - the supreme god and king of the Tuatha Dé Danann; Danu - the mother goddess of the Tuatha Dé Danann; Dian Cecht - god of healing; Étaín - the heroine of Tochmarc Étaíne; Lir - god of the sea; Lugh - legendary hero and High King of Ireland; Manannán mac Lir - god of the sea, like his father Lir; the Morrígan - a trio of war goddesses; Badb - a war goddess who caused fear and confusion among soldiers, often taking the form of a crow; Macha - a goddess associated with war, battle, horses and sovereignty; Nuada Airgetlám - first king of the Tuatha Dé Danann; Ogma - a warrior-poet, said to have invented the Ogham alphabet; Trí Dée Dána - the three gods of crafting; Creidhne - the artificer of the Tuatha Dé Danann, working in bronze, brass and gold; Goibniu - the smith of the Tuatha Dé Danann; Luchtaine - the carpenter of the Tuatha Dé Danann; Aed - a god of the underworld; Egobail - foster son of Manannan mac Lir and father of Aine; Elcmar - chief steward to the Dagda; Ernmas - a mother goddess; Fand - a sea goddess and lover of Cú Chulainn; Fiacha mac Delbaíth - a legendary High King of Ireland; Fionnuala - a daughter of Lir, who was transformed into a swan and cursed by her stepmother; Flidais - goddess of the forest, hunting and wild beasts; Fuamnach a witch of the Tuatha Dé Danann; Iuchar - a son of Tuireann and murderer of Cían; Iucharba - a son of Tuireann and murderer of Cían; Lí Ban - sister of Fand; Mac Cuill, Mac Cecht and Mac Gréine - a trio of brothers who killed Lugh and shared the kingship of Ireland between each other; Miach - a healer and son of Dian Cecht, killed by his father out of jealousy due to his superior healing talents; Midir - a son of the Dagda; Nechtan - father and/or husband of Boann; Neit - a god of war; Nemain - a goddess of war; possibly an alternative name for Badb; Niamh - a queen of Tír na nÓg; Tuireann - father of Creidhne, Luchtaine and Goibniu [6].

The Tuatha Dé themselves were later driven to the underworld by the Milesians, the people of the fabulous spanish king Milesius. There they still live as invisible beings and are known as the Aes sidhe. In a just battle, they will fight beside

mortals. When they fight, they go armed with lances of blue flame and shields of pure white. The goddess Danu can also be identified with the Welsh goddess Don [4]. So as a result we can see that the goddess Dana was not only an Irish goddess. Her cerulean trace was also found in Armorica (ancient Gaul). Besides, she was a goddess of water in Slavic mythology [5]. Such a coincidence can show the connection between all the peoples living on the territory of Europe in ancient times, the connection which can be proved mythologically, etymologically and, first of all, toponymically. The name of Dana (or Danu) is etymologically associated with the name of the Danube. Generally, the word *dānu* stands for “river” or “water” in Scythian [2; 106]. This fact is proved by the image of the goddess Dannan (Danu, Divon, Dana) in different mythological cycles and her representation as she was a goddess of water. The next cycle is *the Ulster Cycle*. It consists of a group of heroic tales dealing with the lives of Conchobar mac Nessa, king of Ulster, the great hero Cú Chulainn, the son of Lug (Lugh).

Notable figures of the Ulster Cycle: Ailill mac Máta - king of Connacht and husband of Medb; Conchobar mac Nessa - king of Ulster; Cú Chulainn - mythological hero known for his terrible battle frenzy; Deirdre - tragic heroine of the Ulster Cycle; when she was born it was prophesied that she would be beautiful, but that kings and lords would go to war over her; Donn Cuailnge - the Brown Bull of Cooley, an extremely fertile stud bull over whom the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* was fought; Fergus mac Róich - former king of Ulster, now in exile; Medb - queen of Connacht, best known for starting the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*; Amergin mac Eccit - poet and warrior in the court of Conchobar mac Nessa; Aithirne - poet and satirist in the court of Conchobar mac Nessa; Bláí Briugu - an Ulster warrior with a geis which requires him to sleep with any woman who stays at his hostel unaccompanied; Bricriu - a hospitaller, troublemaker and poet; Cathbad - chief druid in the court of Conchobar mac Nessa; Celtchar - hero of the Ulaid; Cethern mac Fintain - an Ulster warrior who assists Cú Chulainn; Conall Cernach - hero of the Ulaid; Cruinniuc - a wealthy cattle owner who marries a mysterious woman, later revealed to be the goddess Macha; Cúscraid - a son of Conchobar mac Nessa; Dáire mac Fiachna - an Ulster cattle-lord and owner of Donn Cuailnge, the Brown Bull of Cooley; Deichtine - mother of Cú Chulainn; Éogan mac Durthacht - King of Fernmag; Fedlimid mac Daill - harper and chief storyteller in the court of Conchobar mac Nessa; Findchóem - the sister of Conchobar mac Nessa and wet nurse of Cú Chulainn; Furbaide Ferbend - a son of Conchobar mac Nessa; Láeg - charioteer of Cú Chulainn; Lóegaire Búadach - a hapless Ulster warrior who functions largely as comic relief; Mugain - wife of Conchobar mac Nessa; Naoise - lover of Deidre; Ness - mother of Conchobar mac Nessa; Súaltam - mortal father of Cú Chulainn [6].

The Fenian Cycle is also considered to be a heroic one. It's interesting to mention that the Diarmuid and Grainne story, which is one of the few Fenian prose tales, is a probable source of Tristan and Iseult.

Notable figures of the Fenian Cycle: The Fianna part: Fionn mac Cumhaill - legendary hunter-warrior and leader of the Fianna; Caílte mac Rónáin - a warrior of the Fianna who could run at remarkable speed and communicate with animals, and was a great storyteller; Conán mac Morna - a warrior of the Fianna, often portrayed as a troublemaker and a comic figure; Cumhall - a leader of the Fianna and father of Fionn mac Cumhaill; Diarmuid Ua Duibhne a warrior of the Fianna and lover of Fionn's betrothed, Gráinne; Goll mac Morna - a warrior of the Fianna and uneasy ally of Fionn mac Cumhaill; Liath Luachra - a tall, hideous warrior of the Fianna; Oisín - son of Fionn mac Cumhaill, a warrior of the Fianna and a great poet; Oscar - the warrior son of Oisín and Niamh; Aillen - a monstrous being killed by Fionn mac Cumhaill; Bodhmall - a druidess, warrior woman and aunt of Fionn mac Cumhaill; Cormac mac Airt - legendary High King of Ireland; Finn Eces - poet, sage, and teacher of Fionn mac Cumhaill; Gráinne - lover of Diarmuid Ua Duibhne, betrothed to Fionn mac Cumhaill; Mug Ruith - a powerful blind druid; Plor na mBan - daughter of Oisín and Niamh; Sadhbh - mother of Oisín by Fionn mac Cumhaill [6].

II. IRISH ARTWORKS BASED ON FOLKLORE.

The folklore basis may be first of all mentioned in the context of the popular songs. Exploring of this branch of culture was the most interesting part of our research, as the names and the stories of different heroes, mostly from the first cycle, are narrated in these songs. One of the most famous music bands of modern Ireland is Anúna. The soloist of this band is Michael McGlynn and he is trying to change somehow the style and the manner of habitual and regular sound of Old Irish popular songs. The most interesting example is a song called Fionnghuala, which is telling the story of the daughter of mac Lír, the god of the sea. She was transformed into a swan and cursed by her stepmother.

To make it more clear, here are the lyrics of this song with English translation:

Thuint an gobha fuirighidh mi *The blacksmith said, "I'll wait"*
'S thuint an gobha falbhaidh mi *The blacksmith said, "I'll go"*
'S thuint an gobha leis an othail *The blacksmith said, in his confusion*
A bh' air an dòrus an t-sàbhail *Standing at the door of the barn*
Gu rachadh e a shuirghe *That he was going to go courting*

Sèist:

'Si eilean nam bothan nam bothan *Island of bothies, of bothies*
Eilean nam bothan nam bothan *Island of bothies, of bothies*
Eilean nam bothan nam bothan *Island of bothies, of bothies*
Am bothan a bh' aig Fionnghuala *Fingal's bothies*
'Si eilean nam bothan nam bothan *Island of bothies, of bothies*
Eilean nam bothan nam bothan *Island of bothies, of bothies*
Eilean nam bothan nam bothan *Island of bothies, of bothies*
Am bothan a bh' aig Fionnghuala *Fingal's bothies*

Bheirinn fead air fulmairean *I'd knock spots off the birds*
Bheirinn fead air falmairean *I'd knock spots off the hakes*
Liuthannan beaga na mara *Little lythes of the sea*
Bheireamaid greis air an tarrainn *We would take a while hauling them in*
Na maireadh na duirgh dhuinn *If our hand lines last*

Cha d'thuirt an dadan a' seo *We got nothing here*
Cha d'thuirt an dadan a' seo *We got nothing here*
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Na maireadh na duirgh dhuinn *If our hand lines last*

Thuir an gobha fuirighidh mi *The blacksmith said, "I'll wait"*
'S thuir an gobha falbhaidh mi *The blacksmith said, "I'll go"*
'S thuir an gobha leis an othail *The blacksmith said, in his confusion*
A bh' air an dòrus an t-sàbhail *Standing at the door of the barn*
Gu rachadh e a shuirghe *That he was going to go courting* [7]

We also can mention such songs as Dúlamán, the song about alga; Cúnla, that is believed to be a medieval lullaby; Aililiú na gamhna, the rural song, etc. The world of Irish folksongs is so rich that we can't stop but search more and more songs, which can be actually easily found on the following web-site: <http://www.itma.ie>. As for the artworks dealing with folkloric basis, a lot of authors and artists are found. They were totally captivated with this kind of imaginary history. Among them we find a great Irish poet-symbolist, whose name is William Butler Yeats. His collections of poems are devoted to different Irish mythological figures, such as Aedh, Aengus, Mongan, Niamh. Aedh is his favorite personage. As far as his name means "fire", he is mentioned by the author in the most passionate verses, such as: Aedh gives his Beloved certain Rhymes; Aedh hears the Cry of the Sedge; Aedh Laments the Loss of Love; Aedh pleads with the Elemental Powers; Aedh tells of a Valley full of Lovers; Aedh tells of the perfect Beauty; Aedh tells of the

Rose in his Heart; Aedh thinks of those who have spoken Evil of his Beloved; Aedh wishes for the Cloths of Heaven; Aedh wishes his Beloved were dead, etc. Niamh is also one of the main inspirers of Yeats:

*...And Niamh calling away, come away:
Empty your heart of its mortal dream.
The winds awaken, the leaves whirl round,
Our cheeks are pale, our hair is unbound,
Our breasts are heaving; our eyes are a-gleam,
Our arms are waving, our lips are apart;...*

*...Queens wrought with glimmering hands;
That saw young Niamh hover with love-lorn face
Above the wandering tide;
And lingered in the hidden desolate place,
Where the last Phoenix died... [8]*

The examples are given from the collection of poetry by William Butler Yeats called *The Wind Among the Reeds*.

All in all, the Irish literature based on the folklore can be easily found on the following web-site: <http://www.luminarium.org/mythology/ireland/>.

CONCLUSION.

To sum up, our article highlighted the main principals of the Irish mythological system and its connections with art and literature. We can conclude that the name of each cycle is given either after the name of its leader and main hero, or after the toponymy of the place where the events are happening. The cycles of Irish mythology are presumably divided into two approximate parts. The first deals distinctly with mythological figures, who were but called the gods and whose evidence was left only in toponymy and etymology of different words of various European peoples. This is the Tuatha Dé Danann cycle, which contains the greatest number of personages, varied and represented in different cultures. Their evidence is left only in the names of the rivers and mountains. And it can be called the mythological cycle. The second part is more connected with historical cycle, though it contains a grain of imaginary mythological sense. As we know, the historical cycle in Irish culture is more connected with medieval period. We concluded that the Ulster and The Fenian Cycle can be related to the historical cycle as they deal with the national heroes and historical figures. All in all, the mythology is an enormous monolith which can be considered as the deepest and the richest well of the history, so it is still to be explored.

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